

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0306**

February 28, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Department of Homeland Security  
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE  
Washington, D.C. 20529

Secretary Mayorkas:

We write with concern regarding the lack of operational control over our southwest border. Recent reports indicate that the Biden Administration is currently reducing the number of Tactical Aerostat Systems (TAS) in use along our southwest border.<sup>1</sup> This comes at a time when there are record numbers of migrant crossings, drug seizures, and migrant deaths.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recorded a record number of migrant encounters along the southwest border, totaling 2.38 million.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the situation is not getting better. In January, for the 23<sup>rd</sup> month in a row, there were more than 150,000 CBP encounters along the southwest border. Fentanyl seizures are also on the rise and impacting our communities across the United States. More than 8,600 pounds of fentanyl have been seized along the southwest border in the first four months of this fiscal year.<sup>3</sup> This is enough to kill more than 1.9 billion people.

Our CBP agents and officers need every tool available to them to address this crisis. Aerostat technology is important for agents to patrol from the sky areas they cannot easily access, such as mountainous or rough terrain. The information collected is used to know where individuals are crossing and provides situational awareness on known "gotaways" in both the day and night. The TAS also serve as a deterrent for cartels and smugglers when they are in use and visible. According to CBP, "Flying at this altitude allows Border Patrol Agents to maintain visual awareness of border activity in the United States for longer periods of time".<sup>4</sup> TAS are an incredibly beneficial technology which should be utilized to their full extent to combat trafficking and smuggling.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-admin-removing-most-surveillance-balloons-southern-border-due-cost-sources>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-deploy-aerostat-nogales>

We urge you to prioritize the use of TAS to provide agents and officers more visibility along the border during this ongoing crisis. Given our concern, we respectfully request answers to the following questions, in writing, by March 14, 2023:

1. How many TAS were in use on October 1, 2022? Where were they in use?
2. How many TAS were in use on February 13, 2023? Where were they in use?
3. How does this decision to reduce the number of TAS in use impact border security and surveillance?
4. Was an assessment done of the expected cartel and smuggler response to reduced TAS usage? If so, please provide the assessment.
5. What plans have been made to fill in the critical gaps that removing this technology will create?

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Juan Ciscomani  
Member of Congress



Clay Higgins  
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress



Jake Ellzey  
Member of Congress



Dan Bishop  
Member of Congress



Mary Miller  
Member of Congress



Bob Good  
Member of Congress



Max Miller  
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Andy Biggs  
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